

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, NL
SUBJ: SMALL PARTIES FACE A CRUNCH

REF: '76 THE HAGUE 5830 AND 6069

1. SUMMARY: LONG A FEATURE OF DUTCH POLITICAL LIFE, THE NETHERLANDS MYRIAD SMALL PARTIES ARE COMING UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE WITH THE GROWTH OF LARGE PARTIES OF THE LEFT, RIGHT AND CENTER. SOME MAY DISAPPEAR, BUT SHORT OF A MAJOR REVAMPING OF THE SYSTEM THE DUTCH SHOULD CONTINUE TO ENJOY THE LUXURY OF A PARTY FOR PRACTICALLY EVERY TASTE. END SUMMARY.

2. FOR YEARS A STRONG ATTACHMENT TO IDEOLOGY AND A FIERCE RESISTANCE TO ANY COMPROMISE OF BASIC BELIEFS FOR POLITICAL ADVANTAGE HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A BEWILDERING ARRAY OF POLITICAL PARTIES. THE DUTCH ELECTORAL SYSTEM, BASED ON PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, HAS ENCOURAGED THIS TREND. TWENTY PARTIES CONTESTED THE LAST NATIONAL ELECTIONS WITH FOURTEEN OF THEM POLLING ENOUGH VOTES (TWO THIRDS OF ONE PERCENT) TO WIN AT LEAST ONE OF THE 150 SEATS IN THE SECOND CHAMBER. SOME BASIC CHANGES ARE NOW UNDERWAY WHICH PROMISE TO REDUCE THE FRAGMENTATION OF PARTIES, AT LEAST IN THE SHORT RUN.

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3. THE NETHERLANDS THREE MAJOR CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTIES, CATHOLIC (KVP) AND PROTESTANT (ARP AND CHU), HAVE AGREED TO UNITE FOR THE NEXT ELECTION RUNNING UNDER THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC APPEAL (CDA) BANNER (THE HAGUE 5614). BESIDES AUTOMATICALLY REDUCING THREE PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT TO ONE, THE CDA PROMISES TO ATTRACT MORE VOTERS THAN ITS INDIVIDUAL PARTIES COULD IF

RUNNING SEPARATELY. THE COUNTRY'S TWO OTHER MASS PARTIES, THE LIBERAL (VVD) AND SOCIALIST (PVD) ALSO EXPECT TO DO WELL. THESE DEVELOPMENTS WILL PUT PRESSURE ON THE SMALLER PARTIES. EARLY POLLS INDICATE THAT THE THREE BIG PARTIES COULD GARNER AS MANY AS 130 OF THE 150 SEAT IN PARLIAMENT. THIS WOULD LEAVE ONLY 20 SEATS AS COMPARED WITH THE 44 HELD NOW BY TEN SMALL PARTIES.

4. DESPITE THESE PRESSURES, THE SMALLER PARTIES DO NOT APPEAR TO BE READY TO DISAPPEAR FROM THE SCENE. SOME LIKE D'66 WHICH HAD BEEN GIVEN UP AS HOPELESS CASES ARE STARTING TO MAKE COMEBACKS AND EVEN A FEW NEW ONES SEEM READY TO FIGHT FOR PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION. FURTHERMORE, THE STRENGTH OF THE LARGE PARTIES AT ELECTION TIME MAY BE LESS THAN NOW APPEARS. THE CDA IN PARTICULAR HAS BEEN FLYING EXCEPTIONALLY HIGH, BUT ITS HOLD ON VOTERS COULD BE TENUOUS. ITS CURRENT POPULARITY RUNS CONTRARY TO THE TREND TOWARD DECONFESIONALIZATION IN POLITICAS, AND MANY BELIEVE THAT IT WILL LOSE SOME OF ITS INITIAL ATTRACTIVENESS AS ITS NOVELTY BEGINS TO WEAR OFF. CERTAIN PARTIES SUCH AS THE COMMUNISTS (7 SEATS) AND RIGHT WING RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISTS (SGP 3 SEATS, GPV 3 SEATS, AND RKPN 1 SEAT) WHICH TRADITIONALLY DO LESS WELL IN PUBLIC OPINION POLLS NEVERTHELESS MAINTAIN A CORE OF OLD SUPPORT WHICH GUARANTEES THEIR CONTINUED REPRESENTATION. HASTILY WONDERED BY OTHER LARGE PARTIES MAY ALSO PROVE AFTER THE ELECTIONS TO BE LESS THAN SOLID AND SUSCEPTIBLE TO SCHISM. A SCHISMATIC TENDENCY HAS BEEN ONE OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF DUTCH POLITICS OVER THE YEARS. THE RADICALS (PPR) SPIT OFF FROM THE KVP AND ARP IN 1967, AND S'70 SPLIT FROM THE PVD IN 1970.

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5. BECAUSE NOONE OR EVEN TWO PARTIES COULD UNTIL THE FORMATION OF THE CDA HOPE TO COMMAND A WORKING MAJORITY IN THE SECOND CHAMBER, GOVERNMENTS IN THE NETHERLANDS HAVE BEEN MADE UP OF THREE TO FIVE PARTIES. (THE LAST TWO PARTY GOVERNMENT WAS DISSOLVED IN 1948). COALITION GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTES A CERTAIN STABILITY TO THE NETHERLANDS, PROTECTING SOCIETY AGAINST SHARP SWINGS FROM ONE EXTREME TO THE OTHER. ADDITIONALLY THE THREAT OF SCHISM WITHIN THE LARGE PARTIES IS ALWAYS PRESENT WHICH, COUPLE WITH THE EASE WITH WHICH NEW PARTIES CAN BE FORMED, COMPELTS THE MAJORITY TO BE CONSCIOUS OF THE INTERESTS OF THE MINORITY. ALTHOUGH THE PROLIFERATION OF PARTIES SERVES TO REDUCE DRASIC CHANGES IN POLICIES FROM ONE GOVERNMENT TO THE NEXT, THE NECESSITY OF MULTI-PARTY COALITIONS INCREASES THE POSSIBILITY THAT CABINETS MAY FALL OVER OBSCURE ISSUES.

6. FOR THE MOMENT THE PRESSURES ON SMALL PARTIES REMAIN CONSIDERABLE. SHORT OF A GENERAL REVAMPING OF THE DUTCH ELECTORAL SYSTEM, WE WOULD NOT EXPECT TO SEE ANY DRASIC

REDUCTION IN THEIR NUMBERS. WHILE A LARGE BODY OF OPINION
IN THE NETHERLANDS HOLDS THE VIEW THAT HTER SHOULD BE
A REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF PARTIES REPRESENTED IN PARLIAMENT,
THERE IS LITTLE ENTUSIASM FOR TAKING STEPS TO BRING IT ABOUT.
A RECENT BILL TO RAISE THE MINIMUM NUMBER OF VOTES NEEDED TO
WIN A SEAT WAS EASILY DEFEATED BY A COLAITION OF THOSE DEFENDING
THEIR OWN SEATS, THOSE NOT WISHING TO DENY VOTERS THE FULLEST
POSSIBLE CHOICE AND THOSE WHO DID NOT WISH TO APPEAR GUILTY
OF DOMINATION POLITICS.

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